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SUBJECT: VIOLENCE IN INGUSHETIYA ESCALATES

REF: A. MOSCOW 2371  
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Classified By: Political Counselor Alice G. Wells; reason 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Ingushetiya continues to be the most dangerous place in the North Caucasus, especially for government officials, their families and representatives of law enforcement bodies. The possibility of a full-fledged blood feud is strong, especially after a local court ruled October 6 that the August 30 death of opposition leader Magomed Yevloyev while in police custody was accidental. Despite alarming reports from experts and NGOs and experts on the deteriorating human rights and security situation in the republic, along with a petition drive to replace President Zyazikov, there is no indication that Moscow is prepared to back away from Putin's choice to rule this North Caucasus republic. End Summary.

Violence Continues Apace

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¶2. (SBU) In a report issued September 28, the human rights group Memorial announced that 61 people had been killed so far in Ingushetiya in 2008. Of these, 19 were civilian, 16 were law enforcement officers and 24 were suspected militants. The Memorial report noted that while the number of kidnappings in Ingushetiya was less than the similar time period in 2007, Ingushetiya was overtaking neighboring Chechnya in the number of "extra-judicial" killings, in which police killed suspects in special operations rather than detain them to stand trial.

¶3. (SBU) Exacerbating the situation is the month-long blood feud has already been conducted against the extended family of Ingushetiya's president Murat Zyazikov and its Minister of Internal Affairs Musa Medov since the death of opposition leader Magomed Yevloyev on August 30 (ref. A). Yevloyev's death while in police custody, even if it was unintentional, has ratcheted up tensions in Ingushetiya. There were daily events during poloff's September 22-27 visit to the North Caucasus, including shots fired in the direction of visiting Plenipotentiary Representative for Russia's Southern Region Vladimir Ustinov on the morning of September 23 as he drove through the checkpoint on Ingushetiya's border with North Ossetia. The police and military presence along the main east-west federal highway and at major intersections where Zyazikov travels to and from work was much greater than anything we witnessed in neighboring Chechnya. Four people were injured when a suicide bomber blew up a car on Nazran's Kartoyev Street on the morning of September 30 as Medov passed by.

Government Officials Under Increasing Attack

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¶4. (SBU) During our visit to Nazran on September 26, the acting head of the North Caucasus office of the International Medical Corps (IMC) pointed out a safe haven and steel

reinforced doors at IMC's office. He told RefCoord on September 16 that security in Ingushetiya has deteriorated dramatically from a year ago. He said that on average there were ten "security incidents" per week and that insurgents had begun to target civilians along with police and military officials. The Program Director for World Vision International (WVI) in the Russian Federation told RefCoord on October 3 that violence in Ingushetiya this past Ramadan was two to three times as bad as her previous two Ramadans during which she worked in Nazran. She said that insurgents primarily target security forces and that WVI's local guards are considering leaving their jobs for fear of being targeted because of their uniforms. The head of security for WVI in Nazran is the relative of a high-ranking member of Ingushetiya's police force.

**¶15.** (SBU) After a particularly bloody September, violence had not abated and some Caucasus watchers believed that the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan will bring an intensification of attacks on government officials. The new modus operandi of the insurgency is to place explosive devices under private vehicles. Four separate bombs placed underneath automobiles (two of them belonging to law enforcement officials) exploded on October 4 in Ingushetiya. According to press reports, one car was parked near the prosecutor's office in Nazran. Another exploded in the cemetery near the grave of Zyazikov's cousin who was killed in September. Two more exploded in the northern town of Malgobek, a hotbed of the insurgency over the past year.

**¶16.** (SBU) Opposition leaders mounted a campaign in July to collect signatures on a letter to Russian President Medvedev asking for the return of Ruslan Aushev as president of Ingushetiya. According to campaign organizer Magomed Khazbiyev, over 105,000 residents of Ingushetiya signed the letter and provided their internal passport data. Of these, the opposition sent 80,000 signatures along with the letter to Medvedev. According to Khazbiyev, law enforcement officers seized 25,000 signatures during their search of the residence of opposition member Akhmed Kotiyev. Aushev told listeners to the Ekho-Moskviy broadcast that Medvedev should heed the voices of the citizens of Ingushetiya and return him to his post. Aslambek Apayev, Caucasus expert at the Moscow Helsinki Group and a contributor to the internet-based Caucasian Knot, told us September 16 that Zyazikov's government is taking this latest campaign by the opposition more seriously than its earlier "I Did Not Vote" campaign.

Former President Aushev Stirs the Pot

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**¶17.** (SBU) On September 29 former president Ruslan Aushev appeared live on Ekho-Moskviy radio to answer questions from listeners. On the program, Aushev said that a civil war is brewing in Ingushetiya. During a two-day visit to Ingushetiya, poloff experienced first-hand that it is difficult to receive Ekho-Moskviy transmissions. According to the opposition website Ingushetiya.org, the successor to the banned Ingushetiya.ru, Zyazikov gave orders to block its transmission fully when Aushev appeared on the radio. The current speaker of Ingushetiya's parliament, Makhmud Sakalov, in response to Aushev's claim, stated that all of Ingushetiya's problems started while Aushev was president.

A New Chechnya?

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**¶18.** (C) Sergey Markedonov, Head of the Department of Interethnic Relations at Moscow's Institute of Political and Military Analysis, told us on September 20 that a member of Zyazikov's personal staff called and berated him for also stating in the media that the current situation in Ingushetiya resembles a "civil war." Moscow Helsinki Group Chair Lyudmila Alekseyeva told the Ambassador on September 30 that Ingushetiya was becoming a "new Chechnya" (ref. B). She had earlier stated publicly after her fact-finding visit to Ingushetiya that the government there was "terrorizing" the local population.

Comment

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¶9. (C) There continues to be no indication that the Kremlin will dump Zyazikov, Putin's choice to replace Aushev as president. In the wake of South Ossetia and Abkhazia's "independence," the opposition's latest gambit is to play on the deep-felt resentment by all Ingush over their treatment during the 1944 deportation to Central Asia and the expulsion of most ethnic Ingush from the Prigorodniy region just over the border in North Ossetia.

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